



THE QUINTESSENCE OF MOOMINISM

Tove Jansson has done a fresco for a publishers' building in Helsinki and is now engaged in painting murals for a big restaurant there. Her father's sculptures may be seen in several Finnish towns, including Helsinki. Her mother is a well-known caricaturist as well as a designer of stamps. Miss Jansson has a large studio in Helsinki which is littered with designs for enormous murals, frescoes and all the paraphernalia of an artist. This studio is the centre of Helsinki's artistic community. Artists, writers, and the leading actors and actresses from the Finnish and Swedish theatres meet there for long discussions which sometimes extend far into the night. They sing songs in many languages and dance national dances. During these nights there is a Moomin atmosphere in Miss Jansson's studio. For months in the summer she lives alone on a small island in a small house built by her brother and herself. There is no post, no telephone, no wireless, only a small rowing boat in which Miss Jansson fetches her water and food from the nearest island a mile or more away. Sometimes rough seas will keep her imprisoned on her island for weeks on end, but she is never lonely. Her constant companions are the Moomin family, the Hattifatteners, and all those other fascinating characters which have enchanted the readers of Miss Jansson's books. She loves to escape to her island where she says she can view civilisation quietly and objectively through the eyes of the kindly Moomins.

A friend told me about the Moomins and the world created for them by Finnish artist Tove Jansson. He had most of the books and had read them to his daughter as she was growing up. He sent me a book containing a large collection of her comic strips which had run in the London Evening News between 1954 and 1968. I read through the material and was impressed by Jansson's exquisite rapidograph illustrations. The drawings reminded me of the work of Palmer Cox and William Donahey. Except for the ears and long tail, the Moomin looks like a miniature hippopotamus. The patriarch of this micro-family is Moominpappa who is

involved in writing his memoirs in *THE EXPLOITS OF MOOMINPAPPA*. He is an orphan who has run away and established his own home. The baby of the family is Moomintroll. He woke up one winter when everyone else was in hibernation and had a tough time finding anything to do though he did encounter a lot of the winter creatures seldom seen by Moomins. Sniff is Moomintroll's pal, He looks a little bit like a mouse with kangaroo ears, but not much. Snufkin, Groke, the Hemulen, Thingummy and Bob, and the other creatures that people Jansson's landscape are loosely defined and retain their freedom to be or do just about anything that should occur in the episodic plots of the books. Snufkin is a little man with a feather in his hat who plays a mouth organ. The Hemulen is a male creature who wears a cloak or dress and is the leading Moomin Philatelist. The Muskrat is a philosopher who sleeps all day in a hammock in the Moomins' garden. The Hattifatteners are deaf mute tube-like creatures. The Moomins, who began their existence in *COMET IN MOOMINLAND* in 1946, are totally unpredictable. They live in Moomin Valley in Moominland where everyone does what he likes and seldom worries about tomorrow. Moomintroll loves Snork Maiden who appears to be of his species but it is not certain. The human is droll and deadpan. *FINN FAMILY MOOMINTROLL* (1948) features a magic top hat which can turn whoever or whatever puts it on into something quite different.

Jansson's mini-dialogues, which may occur between any of her characters at just about anytime, usually contain a kernel of truth, a bit of speculation about the nature of things.

"How does one get famous?" the Joxter asked.

"Oh, just by doing something that nobody else has been able to do."

"For instance?" asked the Joxter.

"Inventing a flying houseboat," said Hodgkins with shining eyes.

"I believe it's a bore to be famous," said the Joxter.

"Perhaps it's fun at first, but then I suppose you get used to it, and soon you're sick of it. Like on a Merry-go-round."

"What's that?"

And he's off explaining and drawing the merry-go-round. Jansson's books are written to be read to small children, though beneath the literal level lies a rather negative view of existence. Here is the Joxter's philosophy: "What a life! No end of changing and building-up and pulling-down and jumping about. Such a lot of work may turn out to be really harmful. Oh, I'm dejected just to think of all the people who work and buzz and bumble about, and of what it all leads to. I had a cousin once who studied trigonometry until his whiskers dropped off, and when he had learnt it all a Groke came and ate him up [*THE EXPLOITS OF MOOMINPAPPA*, 1952, p. 38]."

By 1971, there were eleven books.

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HOW TO REGISTER A COPYRIGHT AND PROTECT YOUR CREATIVE WORK

by Robert B. Chickering and Susan Hartman
Charles Scribner's Sons, Macmillan Publishing Co.
\$10.95

This book will tell you what you can copyright and how to go about it. It incorporates the latest changes in the law and covers public domain, transfers, exemptions, renewals and searches. Facsimiles of application forms are included along with detailed explanations and suggestions on how to get the forms and submit samples of your work.

If you're interested in what is happening in the legal world, send a couple of bucks to NOLO PRESS, 950 Parker Street, Berkeley, CA 94710. NOLO NEWS has good articles for the lay reader on what the law is doing to you and for you, reviews of the latest books, and lots of good lawyer jokes you can pass along at parties. The Summer, 1988, issue has a great cover cartoon by Phil Frank.

COMIX WAVE IS ALIVE AND WELL

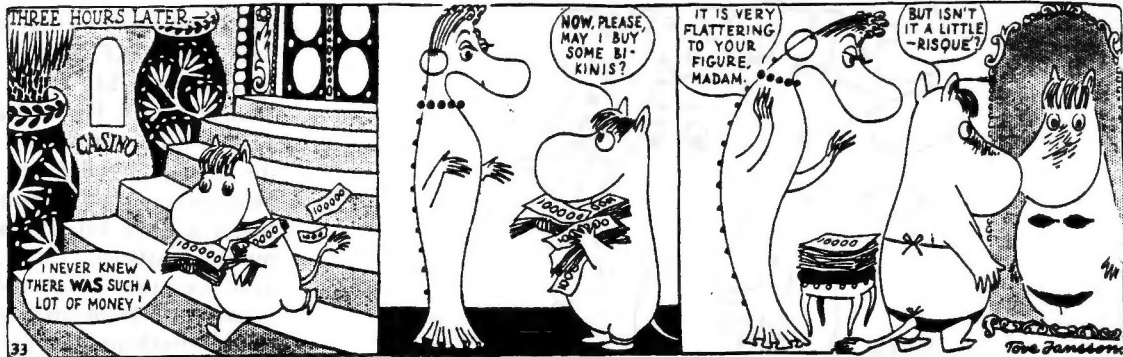
Mary Fleener said she had heard rumors that I had dropped out of the scene, but I'm still doing the same thing I always was. I suspect those rumors come from those who dropped off my mailing list. My newsletter is 15 years old this year. Unlike many comic publications, I try not to repeat myself all the time. I am doing research in various areas related to comics and I publish the results of that research in the newsletter along with some free advertising. I talk less about underground comix these days because I have said what I have to say about the subject and anyone can buy my back issues and read it if they wish. When I see something new in the comix, I'll write about it. Those who want to see pages and pages of ads, see the COMIX BUYERS GUIDE or COMIX F/X. I am a teacher and a writer, not just a source of free advertising.

KNOCKABOUT LOSES IN COURT CRUMB KEEPS ON GETTING BUSTED

Britain's KNOCKABOUT COMICS lost a court case at Stratford's Magistrate Court on the 14th of January. They were defending LONELY NIGHTS, CANNIBAL ROMANCE, and WEIRDOS 11 and 14, all of which were busted for obscenity by Her Majesty's Customs. The books had been on sale for months before this bust took place. Publisher Tony Bennett made a case that the books were works of art and informed the Magistrate that the WEIRDOS had been seen on BBC television in an ARENA program featuring the work of Robert Crumb. The Magistrate disagreed and the books were confiscated. Knockabout had to pay court costs. WEIRDOS 15 and 19, HOMEGROWN COMICS, and ARCADE 7 have been seized under the Customs Consolidation Act of 1876, but no hearing date has been set. No jury was present on 14 January and it falls upon the Magistrate to decide whether the books are indecent or not.

FBI INFILTRATES LIBRARY SYSTEM

That person surreptitiously following you around the stacks may be a self-appointed FBI informant. The FBI has been trying to get librarians to keep track of people who check out books about the Soviet Union and other sensitive areas. Librarians have been outraged by this intrusion on American rights, but anyone who has read anything about Hoover's FBI knows that the FBI has been delving into everybody's business for years. This editor suggests it's a good idea for everyone to read all the books that come out about the FBI, CIA, and other government agencies that routinely snoop on the public. You have a right to know what your elected government is up to.



KIDNAPPERS INVADE CHARLES SCHULZ HOME IN SANTA ROSA

One Sunday evening in May, PEANUTS creator Charles Schulz and his wife were confronted by two masked gunmen at their hilltop home near Santa Rosa in Sonoma County. The men had entered through an unlocked door and were intent upon taking Mrs. Schulz. Jill Schulz, feeling something was wrong as she approached the house, went next door and called the police. Deputies from the Sheriff's Department arrived, but the two men fled into the surrounding foothills and were not found by land or air search. The incident was not made public until a week later because of concern for Schulz' privacy.

MORT DRUCKER NUMBER ONE

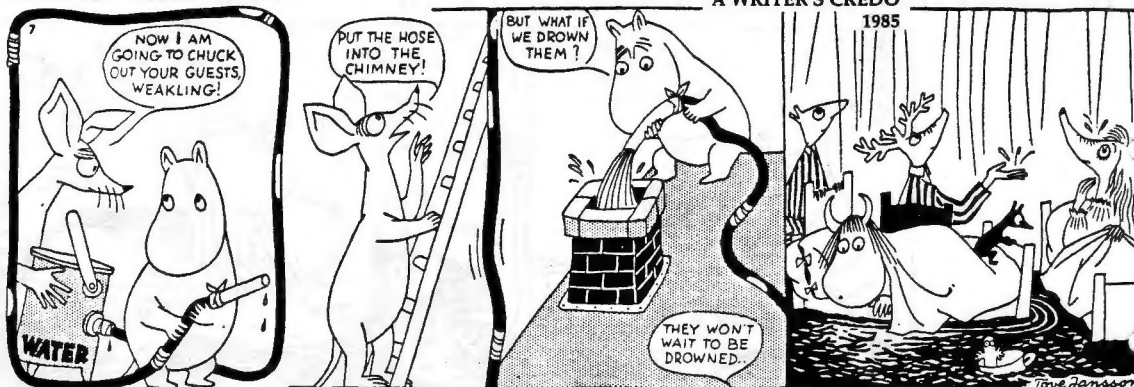
Caricaturist Mort Drucker was named Best Cartoonist of the Year by the National Cartoonists Society. He also won the award for special features. Drucker, a longtime MAD regular has had a couple of best sellers with his Ollie North and Donald Reagan coloring books. He will be a guest at this year's San Diego Comicon, August 4-7.

A REUBEN FOR CHUCK JONES

Charles M. Jones, creator of Pepe Le Pew and The Road Runner, won this year's Reuben Award for Best Animator.

Berkeley: a kid-friendly city?
Berkeley is not a kid-friendly city.
Homeless people beg for money.
Sometimes people break into people's cars.
They also rob houses and take things.
Kids sometimes have to walk alone and be scared.
Bad people call your name and make you come.
Then they try to hurt you.
Homeless people wait in front of the bank.
So when you come out they ask you for money.
They do the same at grocery stores.
There are bad torn up houses.
There's also pollution in the air sometimes.
Kids can't feel safe in their own homes.
They also can't feel safe in their own neighborhood.
So now I end my poem.

Leasa Woods
4th Grade



UNDERGROUND COMIX CATALOG
Once again I have revised my catalog of underground comix. \$1 gets you a listing of 700 titles, including reading copies and rarities, 'homegrown' and major titles. CRUMB, BODÉ, CORBEN, and SPIEGELMAN are all here.

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Mighty Mouse Drug Charges Denied

The Rev. Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association, a conservative consumer action group, has charged that a

cartoon broadcast on April 23 by CBS-TV depicted Mighty Mouse sniffing cocaine.

According to Wildmon, the mouse, withdrawn and depressed, sniffs at something; moments later, he is shown to be happy.

CBS says that Wildmon's charge is nonsense. According to George Dessard, vice president of program practices, Mighty Mouse — who, being a mouse is "clearly established as enjoying aromas" — takes a sniff of a bouquet. "We see the aroma reach his nose in typical cartoon fashion," said Dessard.

Cartoonist Ralph Bakshi called the allegations "lunacy."

Mighty Mouse: dope fiend?

...The writer must play his morally obligatory role as social critic, as spiritual guidon, as intellectual leader. I present this plain and simple argument not to defend but to define an old and honorable tradition in American letters, one still alive despite temporary muffling by this gross, slimy, gluttonous slum of a decade, this Age of Reaganism and Servility. The majority of American writers today have chosen passive nonresistance to things as they are, producing sloughs of poetry about their personal angst and anomie, cascades of short stories and rivers of novels obsessed with the nuances of domestic relationships—suburban hanky-panky—chic boutique shopping mall literary soap opera. When they do speak out on matters of controversy they attack not the evils of our time but fellow writers who may still insist on complaining. Updike, for example, in a recent review of Edmund Wilson's work, attacks Wilson for condemning the uses to which our federal government puts the money it extracts from American citizens. Wilson, in his grave for many years now, cannot respond to Updike's attack, but Wilson's words will live, I predict, long after Updike's fussy, prissy, precious novels have sunk into the oblivion they so richly deserve.

EDWARD ABBEY
A WRITER'S Credo

1985